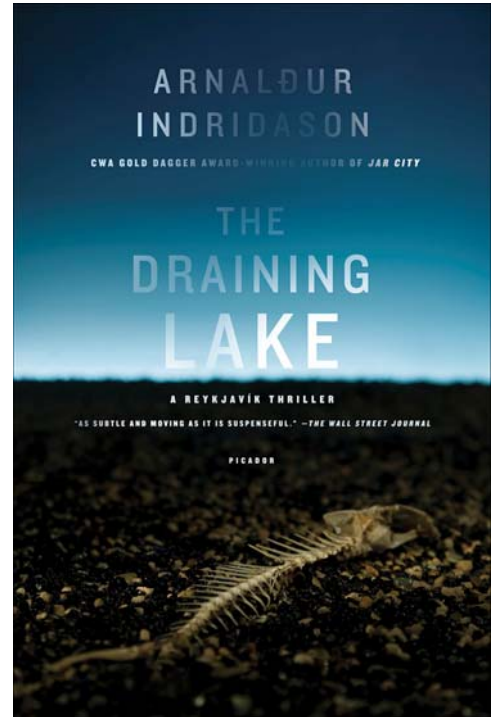


# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *The Draining Lake* *A Reykjavik Thriller*

*by Arnaldur Indridason*

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Draining Lake* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Draining Lake*.

### About the Book

*The Draining Lake* is the fifth book in Arnaldur Indridason's award winning series of Reykjavik thrillers, featuring Detective Erlendur.

Since a recent earthquake, Lake Kleifarvatn has been draining, and its receding waters have uncovered a human skeleton. Inspector Erlendur is called in, and it is up to him, Sigurdur Oli, and Elinborg to determine the identity of the skeleton, and how it ended up in the bottom of a lake. Their main clue, an old piece of Soviet recording equipment used to weigh down the body, leads the investigation through a maze of foreign embassies, official channels, and Iceland's own Cold War past.

Part of that past is an old man named Tomas, who went to school in East Germany in the 1950's, where he hoped he would learn what it was like to live in a truly egalitarian society. Instead, Tomas finds a world of repression, suspicion, and surveillance. His one consolation is a Hungarian student named Ilona, who opens his eyes to the realities of the communist world. As they fall in love and Tomas turns against the system. But then tragedy strikes when Ilona is arrested and disappears, unleashing a chain of events that ripple all the way back to Iceland. Indridason's blend of rich character study, historic perspective, and thought-provoking mystery provides endless points for discussion.

## About the Author

**Arnaldur Indridason** was born in 1961. He worked at an Icelandic newspaper, first as a journalist and then for many years as a film reviewer. He won the Glass Key Award for Best Nordic Crime Novel for both *Jar City* and *Silence of the Grave*, and in 2005 *Silence of the Grave* also won the CWA Gold Dagger Award for best crime novel of the year. (The film of *Jar City*, now available on DVD, was Iceland's entry for the 2008 Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.) Indridason lives in Iceland.

## Discussion Questions

1. How do Erlendur, Sigudur Oli, and Elinborg piece together the clues that they found with the skeleton? What if they weren't able to determine any information about the skeleton itself? Do you think they could have solved the case on the basis of the Russian listening device alone?
2. Erlendur continues to be haunted by the ghosts of his past, as his dead brother, his daughter Eva Lind, and his son Sindri force him to confront his painful memories. Does Erlendur's job as a detective who is obsessed with missing persons help him to come to terms with his past? Or is he merely torturing himself?
3. What kind of a place was Iceland during the Cold War? How might the Cold War have been different in Iceland than it was in Europe or the United States?
4. Which foreign embassies are most helpful to the investigation? Why were some embassies eager to help, while others were uncooperative? Was it just bureaucracy, or did certain embassies have a vested interest in how the case proceeded?
5. Was Tomas naive in his idealism for Soviet communism? Would he have been able to see the system for what it was without Ilona's help, or would he have remained a hardliner?
6. Erlendur has had enough of Eva Lind's drug addiction, and he was beginning to become indifferent to her struggles. But what his son Sindri told him about their childhood makes him feel differently. What did Sindri tell him? Why do you think Eva Lind and Sindri had such different feelings about their father?
7. Erlendur's old boss, Marion Briem continues to be on the scene, despite his illnesses. Why is

Erlendur so drawn to Marion even though he can't say he actually likes him? Does he pity him because he's afraid he'll end up like Marion? How did Marion's tips further the investigation?

8. Erlendur was frustrated with Niels, the man who initially led the case to find the missing salesman back in the seventies. He thought Niels was lazy and indifferent. What makes Erlendur a better detective than Niels? How does Erlendur's ability to identify with the victims give him an edge over Niels?

9. Indridason carefully weaves contemporary and historic storylines, alternating between them. Discuss some of the clever ways in which the author tells the story and releases information to the reader, and how this heightens the suspense.

10. The woman Asta, who was still waiting after all these years for her Leopold to come home, knew nothing about his true identity. Why was she unable to move on and to start a new life without him? Was he just using Asta for a cover, or do you think he really loved her?

11. When Tomas finds out that Lothar is in Reykjavik, he trails him and finds Emil, who provokes him to a blind rage. If you were in Tomas' place, what would you have done when you first saw Lothar? Who would you blame more, Emil or Lothar?

12. Do you think that Erlendur had any sympathy for Tomas? What did the two have in common? How were they different? Is Erlendur capable of forming intimate attachments with other people outside of his cases?

13. Why does the hydrologist who found the body in the beginning reappear in the end? Do you think the man she was with was the same man whom she wanted to avoid in the beginning? If so, why do you think she ended up with him?

14. Emil's denunciation of Ilona eventually led to her death and ruined many lives. But what he did was perfectly in keeping with the law in East Germany at the time. Emil would not have been held accountable for his actions in any court of law. Did Emil deserve what happened to him? Was Tomas justified in killing him? Could there have been any other way that Emil might have been punished for what he had done? Was he capable of feeling remorse for his actions?

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